

SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS
TO SECEDE OR NOT TO SECEDE

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ABSTRACT

Secessionist movements have more than doubled in the last century, and yet very few movements actually succeed in gaining independence. This research study has examined four different cases of secessionist movements in order to identify key factors that make a secessionist movement more likely to succeed at gaining independence. The first two cases are the successful secession of Bangladesh and South Sudan, and the last two cases are the unsuccessful attempts at secession by the Quebecois in Quebec, Canada and the Kurds in the Middle East territories of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The data shows that there are four main criteria that make a secessionist movement more likely to achieve independence: the movement must have endured major injustices by the parent state; it must have majority support in the territory that wishes to secede; the parent state must be weakened; and finally, it must have external support from the international community and neighboring countries. Most secessionist movements that have achieved independence have done so after violent conflict and wars. Despite this fact, nationalist groups have not been deterred in their demands for independence. Therefore, understanding secessionist movements and what it will take for them to achieve independence is an important topic for global security and how the international community can try to maintain peace and security.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1945, there were 74 independent countries; today, there are 195.¹ The surge in the number of independent nations over the past half-century can largely be attributed to the breakup of colonial empires and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but more specifically, the idea of self-determination. While definitions vary somewhat, according to Robert A. Friedlander “self-determination is often considered to be the ‘right’ of a ‘people’ to shape their own political, economic, and cultural destinies.”² The principle of self-determination is generally attributed to President Woodrow Wilson who advocated for future territorial settlements to be based on the criteria of nationality; a criterion that helped shape the future of international affairs.³ While Wilson genuinely believed that the right of communities to govern themselves would lead to more stable peace around the world, he likely did not intend for the concept to create a wave of ethnic and nationalist groups aspiring to have an independent state of their own.⁴ In 1915, there were eight secessionist movements seeking their own independent state; in 2015 there were over fifty.⁵ While self-determination was a driving force behind the independence of post-colonial territories, the concept has been less successful in aiding secessionist movements outside of the decolonization paradigm. However, the low success rate outside of decolonization has done little to deter the rise in secessionist movements around the world.

¹ Diego Muro and Eckart Woertz, *Secession and Counter-Secession: An International Relations Perspective*, (Barcelona: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, 2018), 11

² Robert A. Friedlander, “International Politics,” in R. Vashum, “Self-Determination: Principles, Meanings and Practices,” *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol 26, No. 1 (June, 1996), 65

³ Ibid. 65

⁴ Allen Lynch, “Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of ‘National Self-Determination’: A Reconsideration,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April 2002), 434

⁵ Tanisha Fazal, “Go Your Own Way: Why Rising Separatism Might Lead to More Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs*, (July/August 2018). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/go-your-own-way>

The Bengalis of East Pakistan were the first successful dissident group to exercise secessionist self-determination outside the process of decolonization, gaining independence from Pakistan in 1971.⁶ In 2011, South Sudan gained its independence becoming the newest country and the last successful secessionist movement to date. Only three other countries have gained their independence through secessionist movements since the end of decolonization, Eritrea, East Timor and Kosovo.⁷ Yet countless other movements have tried, some peacefully and others with brutal conflict and wars. This paper will examine two successful secessionist movements, Bangladesh and South Sudan, as well as two unsuccessful movements, the Kurds and the Quebecois. The question for this research is; what factors make secessionists movements successful in some cases but not in others? The goal will be to determine if there are key elements that make secession more likely to succeed. The research will look at the reasons why the particular group wanted to secede; the process the movement went about achieving their goal; and the reaction from the international community. While current secession movements have been more peaceful than in the past, the potential for conflict and violence remains high in some areas of the world. Understanding secessionist movements, the reasons they wish to secede as well as the process they will take to achieve their goals and reaction from the parent state is critical for trying to maintain peace and security in the global world.

⁶ M. Rafiqul Islam, "Secessionist Self-Determination: Some Lessons from Katanga, Biafra and Bangladesh," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Sep. 1985), 212

⁷ Kosovo declared its independence in 2008 and is recognized by 98 UN members, however it is not a member of the United Nations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the theory of self-determination has been studied since World War I, there was no clear theory of secession until the 1990s when the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to Soviet states gaining their independence. Allen Buchanan was the first to try and come up with a theory of secession, and others have since followed.⁸ However, the literature on secession focuses mainly on the legal and moral right to secede, but focuses less on what makes a secessionist movement successful and hence worthwhile. This literature review will look into the emergence of the national self-determination principle and how that set the stage for the growing secessionist movements and the theory of secession. It will also explore how scholars have viewed the right to secede, many focusing mostly on who should have the right to secede on a moral basis, while others focus more on the legal right of secession. It will also look at how some scholars argue that partitioning a state into homogenous territories would help end ethnic violence and civil wars. While the literature does a decent job of framing who should have a theoretical right to secede, it does little to address the validity of their arguments in terms of if a secessionist movement has a chance of achieving their goal for independence.

The Emergence of Nationalist Self-Determination

On January 8, 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson went before Congress to deliver what he considered the basic principles of just and lasting peace. Wilson's famous Fourteen Points speech has been attributed with bringing the idea of national self-determination to the forefront of foreign policy and playing a key role in the political reconstruction of Europe and the world. Not only did the principle of self-determination

⁸ Allen Buchanan, "Toward a Theory of Secession," *Ethics*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Jan 1991)

guide the peace process after the First and Second World Wars but it was also one of the chief goals of the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations.⁹ Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations stated:

The Purposes of the United Nations are: ... 2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.¹⁰

Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 declared, “All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”¹¹

Therefore, under international law, minority groups that qualify as “peoples” have the right to self-determination and the ability to freely determine their political fate.¹² The principle of self-determination largely guided international politics in the 20th century as peoples began appealing to the advocates of self-determination in order to form their own states. However, the principle of self-determination was largely envisioned as a last resort for colonized peoples who were oppressed by their colonial governments.¹³

Therefore, the self-determination and secession of a people from an existing sovereign state is still a matter of great debate and interpretation.

There is no right of secession in international law, according to Milena Sterio “international law merely tolerates secession in instances of external self-determination,

⁹ Hans Kohn, “The United Nations and National Self-Determination,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct. 1958)

¹⁰ United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations*, October 24, 1945. <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html>

¹¹ Allen Buchanan, “Toward a Theory of Secession,” *Ethics*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Jan 1991) 329

¹² Milena Sterio, “Self-Determination and Secession in International Law: The cases of Kurdistan and Catalonia,” *American Society of International Law*, Vol. 22 Issue 1 (January 2018), <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/22/issue/1/self-determination-and-secession-under-international-law-cases-kurdistan>

¹³ Ibid.

where a people is colonized or oppressed.”¹⁴ However, in other instances when a secessionist movement was attempting to secede from a just state where they are not being oppressed, international law remained neutral and left the dispute to be handled by the domestic law of the state and political negotiations between the parent state and secessionist group.¹⁵ In cases where a secessionist movement violates the fundamental norms of international law, like using force to seize territory, secession is prohibited under international law.¹⁶

Allen Buchanan has been one of the leading scholars on secession theory, arguing that the right of self-determination, or what he also calls the “normative nationalist principle,” is one of the least plausible arguments for secession.¹⁷ According to Buchanan the main difficulty with this justification is the meaning of “peoples”, and the potential for there being too many claims of different cultures, ethnicities, languages, etc. to make self-determinations for all peoples realistic, stating, “if the number of ethnic cultural groups or peoples is not fixed but may increase, the normative nationalist principle is a recipe for limitless political fragmentation.”¹⁸ Another reason why self-determination is not a viable argument according to Buchanan is because there will likely be more ethnic and cultural groups than available territory, stating, “it is hard to see how the mere existence of such a group could generate a valid claim to territory on its behalf.”¹⁹

Theories of Secession

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Buchanan, “Toward a Theory of Secession,” 328

¹⁸ Ibid. 328

¹⁹ Ibid. 329

According to Buchanan, there are two types of normative theories of secession, a “Remedial Right Only” and a “Primary Right” to secede. The Remedial Right Only theory asserts, “a group has a general right to secede if and only if it has suffered certain injustices, for which secession is the appropriate remedy or last resort.”²⁰ Whereas the Primary Right theory claims, “certain groups can have a (general) right to secede in the absence of injustice.”²¹ The remedial right only theory that Buchanan subscribes to says a group only has the right to secede if, “the physical survival of its members is threatened by the state” or “its previously sovereign territory was unjustly taken by the state.”²² Remedial right only theorists have different views on what constitutes an injustice or if their grievances warrant secession, however, they all agree that there is no right to secede from a just state.²³ Remedial right only theorists also recognize “special” rights to secession. Special rights could include the state granting a right to secede; the right to secede is included in the constitution; or the original creation of the state included the implicit or explicit assumption that secession at a later point was permissible.²⁴

Primary Right Theorists do not limit secession to being a means to rectify an injustice but instead identify conditions that groups must satisfy to warrant secession.²⁵ There are two main classes of primary right theories, Ascriptive Group Theories and Associative Group Theories. Ascriptive Group theories argue that groups with defined ascriptive characteristics, like sharing a common culture, history or language, have the right to secede. Whereas Associative Group theories argue that there need not be any

²⁰ Allen Buchanan, “Theories of Secession,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Winter 1997) 34-35

²¹ Ibid. 35

²² Ibid. 37

²³ Ibid. 36-37

²⁴ Ibid. 36

²⁵ Ibid. 35

common ascriptive characteristics but simply a group that desires their own state has the right to secede.²⁶ Buchanan referred to this as the *pure plebiscite theory*, meaning, “any group that can constitute a majority (or, on some accounts, a “substantial” majority) in favor of secession within a portion of the state has the right to secede.”²⁷ Scholars like Buchanan and Lea Brilmayer argue in favor of remedial right only theory, while Harry Beran and Christopher Wellman argue in favor of the primary right theory. There are also a few scholars like Donald Horowitz and Michael Jewkes argue against secession all together.

Buchanan sides with the remedial right only theory and calls out two main arguments for what injustices constitute secession, rectificatory justice and discriminatory redistribution. According to Buchanan, rectificatory justice “contends that a region has the right to secede if it was unjustly incorporated into a larger unit from which its members wish to secede.”²⁸ Some argue that rectificatory justice is the only valid justification for secession. For example, Lea Brilmayer asserts that a valid territorial claim is essential to justify secession, more specifically, a direct territorial claim where a “group is entitled to a particular territory on its own merits, as a consequence of international law concerning rightful acquisition.”²⁹ While Buchanan agrees that a historical territorial claim is a less problematic argument for secession, he believes that it is too narrow an argument and that there are other valid ways to make claim to a territory.³⁰ The other argument Buchanan makes for a remedial right to secession is the

²⁶ Ibid. 38

²⁷ Ibid. 39

²⁸ Buchanan, “Toward a Theory of Secession,” 329

²⁹ Lea Brilmayer, “Secession and the Two Types of Territorial Claims,” *Faculty Scholarship Theory* 4879 (2015), 328

³⁰ Buchanan, “Toward a Theory of Secession,” 330

discriminatory redistribution argument, when a government “implements taxation schemes or regulatory policies or economic programs that systematically work to the disadvantage of that group while benefiting others, in morally arbitrary ways.”³¹

Buchanan points out that this argument plays a central role in most secession movements and notes that this is an example of why secession can be justified even in the absence of a historical territorial grievance.³² Primary right theorists argue that remedial right theories are too narrow and do not account for other justifiable reasons for secession.

Harry Beran, a primary right theorist, has written in favor of the consent theory of political obligation, which contends, “consent is a necessary condition for there being an authority relationship between a state and its members.”³³ Beran believes that a right to secede goes hand in hand with the consent theory and that any group is justified in seceding, if it meets two conditions. One, the group constitutes a substantial majority in its portion of the state; and two, the group is able to acquire the resources necessary to create a viable independent state.³⁴ Christopher Wellman is another primary right theorist that holds similar views to Beran. However, Wellman does not believe that nationalist self-determination alone constitutes a justifiable reason for secession. Instead, Wellman contends that any group that resides in a territory has the right to form its own state if the group constitutes a majority in that territory, the state it forms will be able to carry out the legitimate functions of a state, and that severing the territory will not impair the existing states ability to carry on effectively.³⁵ While Wellman argues that groups do

³¹ Ibid. 330

³² Buchanan, “Toward a Theory of Secession,” 330

³³ Harry Beran, “In Defense of the Consent Theory of Political Obligation and Authority,” *Ethics*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Apr. 1977)

³⁴ Buchanan. “Theories of Secession,” 39

³⁵ Ibid. 39-40

have the right to political self-determination, he believes that the right to secession should be based more on the political abilities of the group to ensure that secession will not cause instability for the new or existing state.³⁶

Arguments against Secession

Donald Horowitz takes a different approach by arguing that secession cannot create a homogeneous successor state and therefore is not the answer to solving ethnic conflict, violence or minority oppression.³⁷ Instead, he believes that efforts should be taken to improve the conditions of minorities in their existing state and not encourage them to seek independence. He goes further to state that even the existence of a right to secede “is likely to dampen efforts of coexistence in the undivided state” and will likely make matters worse for the minority group.³⁸ Michael Jewkes also argues that secession may not be a viable option, and that instead federalism is the only way to provide self-determination for concentrated national minorities.³⁹ Jewkes asserts that multinational federalism, which grants national minorities significant devolved competences, enhanced central representation, and constitutional entrenchment, would secure sub-state political autonomy and allow for national self-determination without secession.⁴⁰ Both Horowitz and Jewkes base their arguments on the fact that secession is rarely, if ever, a viable or likely option and that there is a significant gap in the current literature on how minority groups can coexist in a heterogeneous society without the need to secede.

Partition as a Solution to Ethnic Wars

³⁶ Wellman, Christopher, “The Truth in the Nationalist Principle,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 2003), 266

³⁷ Donald Horowitz, “The Right to Secede?” *Nomos*, Vol. 45 (2003), 50

³⁸ *Ibid.* 50-51

³⁹ Michael Jewkes, “Self-Determination Without Secession,” *Public Affairs Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April 2014), 149

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 150-153

While Horowitz and Jewkes argue that secession is not the answer to solving ethnic conflict, others like John Mearsheimer and Chaim Kaufmann argue that partitioning a state is sometimes the only solution for stopping ethnic violence and civil wars. In his article in *The New York Times* in 1993 “Shrink Bosnia to Save It,” Mearsheimer argued that redrawing borders and creating ethnically homogenous states for Bosnians, Croatians, and Serbians would be the only way to stop the fighting in the region.⁴¹ Kaufmann also suggests that partitioning states is the only way to ensure the security and safety of peoples endangered by ethnic civil wars.⁴² Kaufmann emphasizes that opposing groups must be separated into “defensible ethnic enclaves” in order to create true national homelands.⁴³ Mearsheimer and Kaufmann both argue that states that have experienced ethnic violence and wars are unlikely to ever be able to coexist peacefully, and therefore partitioning the territory into ethnically homogeneous states is the best hope for peace.

Conclusion

The literature on secession theory mainly focuses on when a group has a theoretical right to secede, but less on the likelihood that secession will be possible. This research study will look to go beyond whether a group has a theoretical right to secession by instead examining when secessionist movements have actually been successful versus when they have not, in hopes of better identifying key factors that make secession plausible. While international law embraces the principle of self-determination, it does not contain a concrete right to secession. Buchanan’s remedial right only theory, which

⁴¹ John J. Mearsheimer, “Shrink Bosnia to Save It,” *The New York Times* (March 31, 1993), <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/31/opinion/shrink-bosnia-to-save-it.html>

⁴² Chaim Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring, 1996), 137

⁴³ *Ibid.*

states that a group has the right to secede if it has suffered major injustices and has a rightful claim to territory, is the closest theory that reflects actual cases that have been accepted in the international community.

HYPOTHESIS AND METHODS

This research study will examine four different cases of secessionist movements, the Bengali, the South Sudanese, the Kurds, and the Quebecois. It will be a qualitative analysis, using document review to examine the data for each case study. It will focus on three questions to guide the research and help determine why two of the cases were successful at gaining independence and why two of the cases were not successful. For the context of this paper, a successful secession movement is defined as the group gaining full independence from the parent state.

The first question will examine what the grievances were for the particular group and why they wanted to secede. This section will explore whether the group was claiming a remedial right to secede or a primary right to secede. It is expected that only groups that have a remedial right to secede, meaning they have suffered major injustices by the parent state and have a rightful claim to the territory, will have been successful in seceding. For this paper, major injustices refer to violations of basic human rights, oppression, and violence against a specific population in the society. The second question will focus on the process or actions the secessionist group took during their struggle for independence and how the parent state or government responded. The actions taken by the secessionist movement and the response by the parent state will be important in understanding why the group was able to move forward with their goals of independence or how the parent state was able to effectively stop the movement from

achieving independence. It is expected that most parent states are not willing to let a group secede, and will likely respond with opposition or violence in order to undermine and quell the aspirations of the secessionist group. It is also expected that cases that experience extreme violence and conflict will be more likely to achieve independence than those that take a more democratic approach to secession. And lastly, this research will look at how the international community responded to the secessionist movement, did it lend support in any way (either to the secession group or the parent state) or did it not get involved one way or the other? It is expected that the data will show that international community support will be an important determining factor on whether secession was ultimately successful or not. If the international community supported the secessionist groups' desire to secede, they will be more likely to achieve their goal. However, if the international community sided with the parent state or did not get involved on either side, the secessionist movement will be less likely to achieve independence. International community support will be measured by substantial assistance through diplomatic support, financial assistance, military assistance (troops or weapons), and UN Security Council actions (statements or resolutions). Each of the four cases will be broken into the following sections, Historical Context, Grievances, Road to Secession, and International Community Reaction.

CASE STUDIES

Bangladesh

Historical Context

Bangladesh declared its independence from Pakistan on March 27, 1971, but the road to independence came at a high cost. The issues in Pakistan began from its creation,

when the British left India in 1947 and hastily partitioned the region. In the era of decolonization and self-determination, the British were forced to deal with the diverse population of Muslims and Hindus and the demands of the Muslim minority to have their own separate and independent homeland.⁴⁴ In hopes of ensuring a peaceful region and adhering to the principle of self-determination, the British partitioned India along religious lines, placing the bulk of India's Muslim population in a newly created country of Pakistan.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the two Muslim majority regions in India were located in the northwest and the northeast Indian Dominion, which led to an awkward separation of Pakistan territory with India in the middle. Following Pakistan's independence, the capital was designated in the West Pakistan city of Karachi. East Pakistan was made up mostly of Bengali people, who had their own history, culture and language that were separate to that of Western Pakistanis.

Grievances

The issues between West Pakistan and East Pakistan developed in the early stages of Pakistan's independence. East Pakistani grievances over the national language, military, and economic issues would all lead to a growing nationalist spirit of the Bengali. Disputes over the national language began shortly after Pakistan's independence when the central government declared Urdu to be the national language of Pakistan. The Bengali wanted to ensure their language of Bangla received equal recognition in Pakistan society, however the central government was adamant about uniting Pakistan under one language.⁴⁶ A bitter debate ensued, leading to major protests and the deaths of several

⁴⁴ Howard Schaffer and Teresita Schaffer, "Bangladesh: Two Independence Movements," in *Independence Movements and Their Aftermath*. Center for Strategic & International Studies, (January 24, 2019), 13

⁴⁵ Ibid. 14

⁴⁶ Ibid. 14

students in East Pakistan. Eventually a compromise was reached that designated two official languages for Pakistan, Urdu and Bangla. However, the contentious issue put the Bengali on the defensive from the very beginning of independence, which ultimately “damaged Pakistan’s fragile unity and birthed a strong cultural movement in East Pakistan that significantly contributed to the growth of Bengali nationalism.”⁴⁷

The Bengali also had major grievances over how the military was being run and how they were being economically supported. The Pakistani military mostly consisted of Punjabi and Pashtun ethnic groups, a holdover from the British who only recruited from what they called the “martial races,” while the Bengali were virtually excluded from the military altogether.⁴⁸ West Pakistanis and the military dominated Pakistan’s governing institutions, determining security, foreign and economic policies.⁴⁹ The East Pakistani were not only convinced that West Pakistanis was profiting more from their positions, but they were also concerned that the military strategy would only focus on West Pakistan and leave East Pakistan vulnerable in the event of an attack.⁵⁰ The Bengali were also concerned that the economic assistance from the United States and its allies following the independence of Pakistan was only going to the West, while the East was being neglected.⁵¹ The East Pakistanis increasingly felt that they were victims of deliberate and unfair discrimination by the central government in West Pakistan.⁵² But despite their understandable grievances and subservient position, the East Pakistanis attempted to

⁴⁷ Ibid. 15

⁴⁸ Ibid. 15

⁴⁹ Ibid. 15

⁵⁰ Ibid. 15

⁵¹ Ibid. 15

⁵² Ibid. 16

work with the Pakistan government and fight for their rights through political organization.

Road to Secession

In hopes of changing their political situation and end the government discrimination, East Pakistanis first relied on political organization and legal change as their methods for demanding a more equitable role in national affairs. One of their first actions was forming the “United Front” coalition, which was comprised of opposition leaders and parties that sought to challenge the incumbent Muslim League in provincial elections.⁵³ The United Front ran on a platform that demanded more autonomy in the region, as well as other reforms in regards to agriculture, trade, and political arrests and detentions.⁵⁴ However, the central government in Karachi found these demands to be unacceptable and would not tolerate any dissidence from the Bengali or the United Front. The United Front eventually dissolved and the East Pakistanis were back to square one with unstable political groups and frequent intervention by the central government.⁵⁵

The Bengali took political action again when the strongest political party in the east, the Awami (People’s) Muslim League, “radically changed the focus of Bengali demands.”⁵⁶ The President of the league, Sheikh Mujib, set forth a Six Point Program that went much further than the United Front demands, calling for, “two sovereign autonomous states, limiting the power of the federal government, new currency provisions, autonomous taxation and revenue collection, a new foreign exchange

⁵³ Ibid. 16

⁵⁴ Ibid. 16-17

⁵⁵ Ibid. 17

⁵⁶ Ibid. 18

arrangement, and the establishment of an East Pakistani armed force.”⁵⁷ The central government under President Ayub took the Six Point Program as a strategy for East Pakistan to secede and therefore blocked the agenda and jailed the Mujib and other Awami Leaguers.⁵⁸ Ayub eventually resigned from the Presidency after increased opposition and a failed attempt to bring opposition leaders together to discuss fundamental constitutional questions.⁵⁹

The new president, Yahya Kahn promised early elections for a National Assembly and issued a “decree stipulating that provincial representation in the newly chosen body would be allocated on the basis of population.”⁶⁰ The Awami League handily swept the elections in East Pakistan, winning 160 of the province’s 162 National Assembly seats, a win that would have set in motion the division of power between the East and the West. Yahya and his commanders were shocked by the outcome and what it meant for the stability of the country, and therefore delayed calling the first meeting of the assembly and instituted martial law.⁶¹ Major strikes and riots erupted in East Pakistan as Sheikh Mujib called for civil disobedience.⁶² Mujib and President Khan met to try and reach an agreement and avoid war, but instead Mujib was arrested and around 80,000 West Pakistani soldiers began what would be known as *Operation Searchlight*, a massacre that would leave an estimated 500,000 to over 3 million dead.⁶³ The atrocities carried out by the Pakistani military gained international attention, the Indian Prime Minister being the

⁵⁷ Ibid. 18

⁵⁸ Ibid. 18

⁵⁹ Ibid. 18

⁶⁰ Ibid. 19

⁶¹ Ibid. 20

⁶² Lorraine Boissoneault, “The Genocide the U.S. Can’t Remember, But Bangladesh Can’t Forget,” *Smithsonian*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/genocide-us-cant-remember-bangladesh-cant-forget-180961490/>

⁶³ Ibid.

first to label the attacks as “genocide.”⁶⁴ The massacre of the East Pakistanis finally ended when India came to the aid of the East Pakistanis and West Pakistan declared war on India.⁶⁵ A decisive victory by India allowed East Pakistan to gain their independence and declare the new country of Bangladesh.

International Community Reaction

The international community was well aware of the atrocities taking place by the Pakistani soldiers in East Pakistan, but the reaction on how to respond was mixed between the leading powers of the world. The United States considered Pakistan an ally in the region, and yet, the American consul-general in Dhaka and the U.S. Ambassador to India saw what was happening in East Pakistan and both called on President Richard Nixon to end U.S. support for the Pakistani government.⁶⁶ However, President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger were hesitant to end their support of the Pakistani regime. In the midst of the Cold War, the United States was more concerned with the Soviet Union’s influence in India than it was with the Pakistan military’s actions in East Pakistan.⁶⁷ The British government also struggled to get involved with what was happening in Pakistan, labeling the crisis as a civil war and taking the approach of non-interference in Pakistan’s internal affairs.⁶⁸ India and the Soviets attempted to raise the issue at the United Nations, however the international community sided with non-interference in the internal affairs of a state.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sue Levenstein and Robert Hathaway. “The Secession of East Pakistan in 1971 and the Question of Genocide,” *Wilson Center*, December 15, 2010, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-secession-east-pakistan-1971-and-the-question-genocide>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

India on the other hand did not have the luxury of ignoring what was happening in East Pakistan. As millions of East Pakistanis flooded into India for refuge, the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to take action against Pakistan. India provided training and sanctuary to the East Pakistani armed resistance and Pakistan responded by attacking Indian airfields, leading to the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971.⁷⁰ The war only lasted 13 days, during which India swiftly brought the Pakistan government to its knees. Following the decisive win by India, the Bengalis declared their independence from the weakened Pakistan. The international community had little ability to object, and soon recognized Bangladesh as an independent country. India's support was critical in the independence of Bangladesh.

South Sudan

Historical Context

South Sudan declared its independence from the greater Sudan on July 9, 2011. However, like Bangladesh, the road to independence came at a great cost. The region of Sudan contains a wide diversity of peoples, with an estimated 600 ethnic groups or tribes speaking more than 400 languages.⁷¹ Broadly speaking, the region is divided by the Arab heritage in the north and the African heritage in the south, the groups heavily divided along cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, and economic lines.⁷² The northern part of Sudan has a long history of human settlement where ancient civilizations flourished along

⁷⁰ "1971 war: The Story of India's victory, Pak's surrender, Bangladesh Freedom." *Business Standard* (December 16, 2018), https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/vijay-diwas-how-india-ended-pak-s-atrocities-and-ensured-freed-bangladesh-118121600120_1.html

⁷¹ "Sudan: a country study." *Federal Research Division, Library of Congress*: edited by LaVerle Berry. Fifth ed. First Printing, 2015. http://www.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_Sudan.pdf. xli

⁷² *Ibid.* xlii

the Nile.⁷³ By the 8th century AD Arabs from Egypt began arriving in Sudan, which slowly began to spread Islam across the region.⁷⁴ The 19th century brought the presence of the Turks and Egyptians, the Mahdist state and then finally British colonialists. The southern part of Sudan is made up of the Nilotic peoples who have been in the region for centuries; they practice agriculture and pastoralism and live for the most part in stateless societies.⁷⁵ Geographic isolation largely protected southerners from the outside influence and the spread of Islam, enabling them to retain their cultural and social heritage and their political and religious institutions.⁷⁶ It was not until the 19th century that the slave trade brought southerners into contact with their northern neighbors. Arab slave traders preyed upon southerners, resulting in deep hatred for northerners and significant fear and suspicion that has lasted into the 21st century.⁷⁷

In 1899, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium set up joint authority over the Sudan region by Britain and Egypt, however Britain largely assumed responsibility for governing the territory.⁷⁸ The British had separate policies for northern and southern Sudan. In the north they focused on economic development and modernizing the government in Khartoum, but they virtually ignored the already underdeveloped south, economically, politically and socially.⁷⁹ The economy in the south suffered due to the region's isolation, lack of education and the unwillingness to divert resources from the north to the south in order to stimulate economic development.⁸⁰ Civil unrest throughout

⁷³ Ibid. xlii

⁷⁴ Ibid. xlii

⁷⁵ Ibid. xlii

⁷⁶ Ibid. 14

⁷⁷ Ibid. 14

⁷⁸ Ibid. 22

⁷⁹ Judy Mayotte, "Civil War in Sudan: The Paradox of Human Rights and National Sovereignty," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Winter 1994), 501-502

⁸⁰ "Sudan: a country study," 27

Sudan and the demand for self-determination from colonial powers eventually led the British to leave Sudan, allowing Sudan to declare independence in 1956 without conflict. However, the newly independent government inherited many problems that would lead to decades of conflict and civil war between the north and the south.

Grievances

Since Sudan's independence, the Arabs in the north had been in control of the government; creating economic, military, political and social policies for the entire country and denying any representation for peoples other than themselves in the governing process.⁸¹ The Sudanese government had also alienated the southern Sudanese with the imposition of Islamic law and concentration of resources in the north.⁸² The marginalization of southerners by the central government would ultimately lead to the unrest by the southerners and ignite their desire to be free of the Khartoum government.

Sudan has been in near constant conflict since it gained independence in 1956, with almost continual armed rebellion in the South from 1955 to the early 2000s. The first Sudanese Civil War began on the eve of Sudan's independence as the Muslim's in the north prepared to take over control of the government and unite Sudan under one religion and one culture. The Southerners, who were deeply rooted in African culture, were afraid of becoming second-class citizens and thus exploited by the Muslim government in Khartoum. The southern army officers mutinied in 1955, eventually forming the Anya-Nya guerrilla movement that fought for separation.⁸³ Several hundred

⁸¹ Ibid. xlii

⁸² Ibid. xlii

⁸³ IKV Pax Christi. "Sudan Whose Oil? Sudan's Oil Industry: Facts and Analysis," *Fatal Transactions and European Coalition on Oil in Sudan*. (April 2008). <https://www.paxforpeace.nl/media/files/sudans-whose-oil.pdf>, 5

thousand Sudanese died and thousands fled to neighboring countries during the war.⁸⁴ In 1972 the Addis Ababa peace agreement was signed, which gave the South limited regional autonomy and their own government. However, subjugation of the south continued even after the peace agreement was signed, especially after it was discovered that the southern region was sitting on large oil reserves.⁸⁵ The Khartoum government systematically violated the Addis Ababa agreement. They imposed Islamic law and set out to re-divide the South. Not only was a major project carried out that would change the natural flow of the Nile by diverting large amounts of water directly to the North, but the government also changed the borders so that newly discovered oil fields were shifted from the South to the North.⁸⁶ Southern soldiers and officers in the Sudanese army rebelled and created the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), sparking the Second Civil War in 1983. The government in Khartoum began forcibly removing people from their land in and around the oil fields in Southern Sudan. Reports by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, ECOS and other organizations reported that not only were hundreds of thousands of people violently displaced, their villages emptied and houses burned, but tens of thousands of people were killed, wounded, raped, and boys and girls abducted in order to secure oil fields.⁸⁷

Road to Secession

South Sudan's first attempt at regional autonomy was through the Addis Ababa Agreement following the First Sudanese Civil War. The agreement was doomed to fail from the outset as few northerners or southerners actually supported the agreement.

⁸⁴ Mayotte, "Civil War in Sudan," 502

⁸⁵ IKV Pax Chrisit. "Sudan Whose Oil? Sudan's Oil Industry: Facts and Analysis." 5

⁸⁶ Ibid. 5

⁸⁷ Ibid. 31

Inedeed, many of the southern commanders and political leaders were not even aware of the agreement until it was publicly announced.⁸⁸ The Anya Nya guerillas that had fought for separation were fighting for complete independence, not regional autonomy, and therefore were vehemently opposed to the agreement. The central government in Khartoum had no intention of granting the south real autonomy, but it was a way to end the civil war and still maintain control of the South.⁸⁹ The Sudan government under President Jaafar Nimeiri rescinded recognition of South Sudan's regional autonomy in the early 1980s and split the region into three independently governed regions and imposed Arabic as the official language.⁹⁰ These actions led to the formation of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), as well as a political arm, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the breakout of another civil war.⁹¹

The Second Sudanese Civil War lasted for 22 years. While atrocities were committed on both sides, the Sudanese central government was especially brutal on the civilian populations in the south. Not only did the government of Sudan use aerial bombardments and helicopter gunships to attack the southern Sudanese population, but they also used food as a weapon by refusing to allow food to reach civilian populations.⁹² An estimated 2.5 million people were killed and over 4.5 million displaced during the war.⁹³ The war finally came to an end in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA. The CPA committed the state to holding a self-determination referendum in the south, which they

⁸⁸ Stephanie F. Beswick, "The Addis Ababa Agreement: 1972-1983 Harbinger of the Second Civil War in the Sudan," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3 (1991). 192

⁸⁹ Ibid. 193

⁹⁰ Mayotte, "Civil War in Sudan," 503

⁹¹ Ibid. 503

⁹² Ibid. 507

⁹³ Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Conflict in South Sudan and the Challenges Ahead," Congressional Research Service (September 2016), 1

set to vote on in 2011.⁹⁴ Unsurprisingly, the South voted almost unanimously in favor of secession, leading to the creation of South Sudan on July 9, 2011.

International Community Reaction

The United States, European governments, the U.N. General Assembly, and the U.N. Human Rights commission all condemned the government of Sudan for its human rights abuses during the Sudanese Second Civil War.⁹⁵ Sudan's neighboring countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda also provided support to the South Sudanese in a number of ways. Eritrea broke its diplomatic relations with the Khartoum government in 1994 in a public display of support for the South Sudanese, and also allowed the opposition forces training bases in west Eritrea.⁹⁶ Uganda also strongly supported the SPLA, providing them with weapons and territory for training.⁹⁷ Ethiopia was more discreet with its support, but it also provided territory for training to the SPLA.⁹⁸

The leading powers in the international community provided humanitarian assistance to Sudan and played an important role in supporting the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace process that would eventually end the conflict between the Sudan government and the SPLM/A.⁹⁹ The United States played a key role in supporting South Sudan's independence. A bipartisan coalition pushed for two decades to have Sudan be a foreign policy priority and helped bring the war-ravaged area

⁹⁴ John Campbell, "Ten Years Later: Taking Stock of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement", *Council on Foreign Relations*, (January 9, 2015), <https://www.cfr.org/blog/ten-years-later-taking-stock-sudans-comprehensive-peace-agreement>

⁹⁵ Mayotte, "Civil War in Sudan," 519

⁹⁶ "Military Support for Sudanese Opposition Forces," Human Rights Watch, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1998), <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/sudan/Sudarm988-07.htm>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ "Sudan A Country Study," 292

to the attention of the international community.¹⁰⁰ The U.S. was also the leading donor to South Sudan's cause. During the Clinton administration, more than \$20 million surplus U.S. military equipment was sent to the frontline states of Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia to help push back military gains made by the Sudanese government.¹⁰¹ The Clinton administration also placed Sudan on the state sponsor of terror list and imposed comprehensive economic sanctions, putting additional pressure on the Khartoum government to change their behavior.¹⁰² President George W. Bush also supported the South Sudanese cause and appointed a special envoy to focus on peace negotiations in Sudan, which were finally realized in 2005 with the signing of the CPA. After the CPA was signed, the United States was the largest financial contributor to the U.N. peacekeeping mission and a key donor for ceasefire monitoring and other efforts to mitigate conflict.¹⁰³ U.S. support and the support of the international community played an important role in seeing to the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and that the self-determination of the South Sudanese people was realized.

Quebecois

Historical Context

Quebec is the largest of Canada's ten provinces and has a unique heritage and culture. On two separate occasions, the Quebec provincial government has held referendums allowing for the Quebec electorate to vote on the question of Quebec independence. On both occasions, the population rejected the provincial government's

¹⁰⁰ Rebecca Hamilton, "U.S. Played Key Role in Southern Sudan's Long Journey to Independence," *The Atlantic* (July 9, 2011), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/07/us-played-key-role-in-southern-sudans-long-journey-to-independence/241660/>

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Blanchard, "Conflict in South Sudan and the Challenges Ahead"

proposal and voted to stay with Canada. Despite these defeats, separatist parties remain active in Canadian politics, still pushing a nationalist agenda and more autonomy for the Quebec province. Founded and colonized by the French, Quebec was surrendered to the English following the French and Indian wars and Treaty of Paris in 1763. Undeterred by the surrounding Anglophone populations, Quebec kept its distinct French heritage and culture, the only place in North America where the majority of people speak French. It was not until Quebec society began undergoing significant changes in the 20th century that Quebecers began to feel that their distinct culture was under threat and needed to be preserved.

Grievances

In the late 1960s, inspired by events around the world like the decolonization in sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb, the Cuban Revolution, and the American Civil Rights Movement, a Quebec nationalist sentiment was beginning to stir in the province.¹⁰⁴ At the time, Anglo-Canadian interests largely dominated the Quebec economy, with French Canadians salaries being on average 35% lower than those of Anglophones, leading many to feel that there was a form of internal colonialism happening in Quebec and that French Canadians were being treated as second-class citizens.¹⁰⁵ But Quebec nationalism was mostly driven out of the fear that the majority Francophone population was struggling to keep its unique identity in a predominantly Anglophone Canadian federation. The fear of assimilation in Quebec with that of the English-speaking majority in Canada nourished nationalist sentiment, leading many to

¹⁰⁴ Francois Rocher, "Self-Determination and the Use of Referendums: the Case of Quebec," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 27, No.1 (March 2014), 27

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 27

believe that the only way to keep Quebec's unique French culture would be to create an independent Quebec.

Road to Secession

The Quebec independence movement began in the 1960s, commonly referred to as the "Quiet Revolution", during a time when Quebec society was undergoing considerable changes and modernization. The nationalist ideology of the 1960s was largely focused on giving Quebec more control of the economic, social and cultural development in the region. Quebec nationalists wanted to bring about social and economic change and believed the only way to achieve this was by gaining more control of the Quebec province. The movement to defend the Quebecois culture and improve their economic and social status won its first victory with the election of the Quebec Liberal Party (QLP) in 1960.¹⁰⁶ The QLP advocated for constitutional reforms that would give more authority to the Quebec government in areas like culture, economic management and natural resources, believing that greater political autonomy was a way to regenerate the French-Canadian culture in the province.¹⁰⁷ While the QLP promoted more power for the Quebec government and for obtaining special status recognition for Quebec, they were not yet advocating for sovereignty in the region. However, growing nationalist sentiment led more and more Quebecers to advocate for the independence of Quebec.¹⁰⁸

In 1968 the Parti Quebecois (PQ) was formed, advocating national sovereignty for Quebec and secession from Canada as their main platform. Yet, polls taken in the late 1960s showed that only about 11% of the electorate favored independence and over 70%

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 26

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 26

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 27

opposed it.¹⁰⁹ While support for the movement slowly grew over the years, by the mid-1970s support for independence was still only around 20%.¹¹⁰ Despite the low support for independence, the PQ party came to power in 1976 receiving 41.4% of the votes and 71 seats, unseating the QLP who only received 33.8% of the votes and 26 seats.¹¹¹ Understanding that the majority of Quebecers were not in favor of sovereignty, the PQ ran their election campaign as the party of “good government” that would replace the weakened QLP that had been marred by various scandals.¹¹² The election victory by the PQ came as a shock to many, especially the central government that feared the separatist party’s agenda. The central government, led by Pierre Elliot Trudeau, responded by promoting national unity and trying to come up with solutions that would preserve Quebec’s distinct character while keeping Canada united.¹¹³ During the election campaign, the PQ had promised their supporters that a referendum would be held on the issue of independence, and in 1979 the party published its intentions in a white paper entitled *Quebec-Canada: A New Deal. The Quebec Government Proposal for a New Partnership Between Equals: Sovereignty-Association (Quebec 1979)*.¹¹⁴ The referendum question was announced on December 20, 1979, however instead of asking Quebecers to vote in favor of sovereignty, they asked them to vote on granting a mandate for negotiating terms between Quebec and Canada; if it passed, a second referendum would take place on the issue of sovereignty once the negotiation was complete.¹¹⁵ Both sides began months long referendum campaigns in the run-up to the vote. Those in favor

¹⁰⁹ Maurice Pinard, “The Dramatic Reemergence of the Quebec Independence Movement,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 2 Rethinking Nationalism and Sovereignty (Winter 1992), 480

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 480

¹¹¹ Rocher. “Self-Determination and the Use of Referendums,” 28

¹¹² Ibid. 28

¹¹³ Ibid. 28

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 28

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 29

of sovereignty focused on the collective identity of the Quebecois and the criticism of federalism, which the party argued led to inequality and injustice for Quebecers.¹¹⁶ Those that opposed sovereignty focused their campaigns on the idea that a person can be both a Quebecer and a Canadian, while also waging a fear campaign that an independent Quebec would mean higher taxes and the loss of benefits and pensions for the unemployed and elderly.¹¹⁷ Ultimately, almost 60% of the electorate voted against the mandate to begin negotiating terms of sovereignty. Immediately after the vote, the central government started negotiations on patriating the Constitution, eventually leading to the *Constitution Act, 1982*, with the support of all provinces except for Quebec.¹¹⁸ This constitutional reform promoted the country's unity and the central government's role as the legitimate voice for all Canadians, something the Quebecois took issue with, creating increased distrust between Quebec and the central government.¹¹⁹ The issue of Quebec independence would be voted on again in 1995.

The second referendum took place in a much different political landscape. Between 1980 and 1995, Canada had adopted a new constitution and went through two rounds of constitutional negotiations to try and get the Quebec government to accept the new constitution, both of which failed.¹²⁰ Growing frustration among the Quebecois was leading more to favor independence, for the first time reaching 45% support in 1991.¹²¹ The dissatisfaction in Quebec reflected in the polls; in the 1993 federal election a separatist party, the Bloc Quebecois (BQ), became the first separatist party in Canada's

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 29

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 32

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 33

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 34

¹²⁰ Ibid. 34-37

¹²¹ Pinard, "The Dramatic Reemergence of the Quebec Independence Movement," 480

political history to become the Official Opposition.¹²² In the 1994 provincial elections in Quebec, the PQ defeated the QLP and once again a plan to hold a referendum on independence was in the works.¹²³ The arguments during the referendum campaign were the same issues raised in the 1980 campaign; those pushing for the “yes” vote focused their argument on Quebecers right to decide their future and the preservation of Quebec’s identity, while those on the other side argued that Quebec independence would come at a great economic cost.¹²⁴ Ultimately, Quebec sovereignty was rejected once again, but this time by a very slim majority of only 1.16%.¹²⁵ While the separatist parties mostly lost their momentum following the failure of the second referendum, the Bloc Quebecois and the Parti Quebecois both remain active in Canadian politics today. The Bloc Quebecois recently saw a reemergence in the latest Canadian elections on October 21, 2019, winning 32 seats, making them the third largest party in the House of Commons.¹²⁶ The election has led many to wonder if Quebec’s nationalism is experiencing a reawakening. As a former minister in the Parti Quebecois government said after the election, “We can once again tell our Scottish and Catalan friends that in the struggle for self-determination, Quebec is back on Monday.”¹²⁷

International Community Reaction

On July 24, 1967 during the World Expo 67 in Montreal, French President Charles de Gaulle closed a speech with the line “Vivre le Quebec Libre!” (“Long Live Free Quebec”). Earlier in the day, de Gaulle vowed that France would accompany its

¹²² Rocher. “Self-Determination and the Use of Referendums,” 37

¹²³ Ibid. 36

¹²⁴ Ibid. 38

¹²⁵ Ibid. 39

¹²⁶ Dan Bilesfsky, “The Reawakening of Quebec’s Nationalism,” *The New York Times* (November 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/01/world/canada/Bloc-Quebecois-Nationalism.html>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

former colony on its road to liberation, stating, “A people – and you are a piece of the French people – must not depend only on itself. This is going to happen. I see it, I feel it”.¹²⁸ President de Gaulle’s statements not only gave Quebec’s secessionist movement credibility and momentum, but it also thrust Quebec’s political aspirations into the international spotlight.¹²⁹ From then on, the Quebec secessionist movement operated under the assumption that Paris would automatically support Quebec as an independent country if a referendum on the issue was to pass.¹³⁰ However, French support for Quebec’s independence did not continue with successive French Presidents. In order to warm relations with Canada, France eventually took a neutral position on Quebec independence, insisting their policy was one of non-interference.¹³¹ Documents from the Clinton Administration have shown that the U.S. had reservations on whether they would immediately recognize Quebec if the referendum were to pass or if they would be included in the North America Free Trade Agreement.¹³² But for the most part, Quebec’s independence movement was seen as a domestic issue in the international community, and therefore the policy at large was one of non-interference.

Kurds

Historical Context

¹²⁸ Konrad Yakabuski, “Fifty Years on, does ‘Vive le Quebec libre’ still resonate?” The Global and Mail, (July 2017), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/fifty-years-on-does-vive-le-quebec-libre-still-resonate/article35735629/>

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Kyle Matthews, “Obstacles to Independence in Quebec,” *OpenCanada.org* (April 2014), <https://www.opencanada.org/features/obstacles-to-independence-in-quebec/>

¹³¹ Yakabuski, “Fifty Years on, does ‘Vive le Quebec libre’ still resonate?”

¹³² Matthews, “Obstacles to Independence in Quebec”

The Kurds are the largest ethnic group in the world without a state to call their own.¹³³ Around 30 million Kurds currently live in what is referred to as “Greater Kurdistan”, a contiguous region in the north central area of the Middle East, stretching across Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. They form a distinctive community, united by race, culture, language, and history. As one of the oldest peoples in the region, Kurdish tribes have come into contact with the Ancient and Medieval Persians, Alexander the Great, the Mongols, Ottoman Turks and others, often forced to retreat into the mountains for shelter from the more threatening invaders.¹³⁴ The sanctuary of the mountains helped to preserve their distinct ethnic culture throughout the centuries.¹³⁵ Their long history of marginalization and persecution has led them to pursue independence, the roots of the modern Kurdish nationalist movement taking hold with the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

At the end of WWI, when the idea of self-determination was beginning to shape international affairs and igniting nationalist aspirations around the world, the Kurds saw their first real opportunity to establish a Kurdish nation. The Allies had drafted the Treaty of Sevres that would deal with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, carving up the near and Middle East into nation-states. The treaty also made provisions for an autonomous Kurdish state, Kurdistan.¹³⁶ However, the Turkish Republic rejected the treaty and instead negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne, this time without any provision for

¹³³ “The Time of the Kurds,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (October 4, 2017), <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/time-kurds#!time-kurds>

¹³⁴ Jan Knappert, “The Kurds: A Brief History,” *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (June 1993), 67-70

¹³⁵ “Kurdish History,” *The Kurdish Project*. <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-history/>

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Kurdish independence or autonomy.¹³⁷ Since the end of World War I, the Kurds have continued to fight for independence and self-government, however they have largely fought separate guerrilla campaigns in their individual countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. While the Kurds generally share common identity, there are religious, linguistic and tribal diversities among Kurdish groups. Their inability to form a united front in their fight for independence has likely played a role in why they have been unsuccessful in establishing an independent Kurdistan.

Grievances

While the Treaty of Lausanne failed to deliver an independent Kurdistan for the Kurdish people, their nationalist aspirations were not extinguished. However, the central governments of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria sought to suppress the nationalist agenda of the Kurdish people and force them to assimilate or face harsh consequences and oppression. In 1924, the Turkish government not only banned the use of the Kurdish language, but also took oppressive rule of Kurdish areas by burning villages, displacing people, and confiscating their property.¹³⁸ Reza Shah of Iran also had a record of brutal oppression of the Kurds, he banned the Kurdish language and national dress and also destroyed tribal and other organizations through a program of executions and deportations.¹³⁹ Even after the Shah, the Islamic Republic government in Iran also routinely executed Kurdish activists.¹⁴⁰ In Syria, the government banned Kurdish dialects and prohibited the teaching and learning of Kurdish as well as restricted

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Henri J. Barkey, "The Kurdish Awakening: Unity, Betrayal, and the Future of the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2019-02-12/kurdish-awakening>

¹³⁹ Mufid Abdulla, "Mahabad – The First Independent Kurdish Republic," *The Kurdistan Tribune* (June 2011), <https://kurdistantribune.com/mahabad-first-independent-kurdish-republic/>

¹⁴⁰ "The Time of the Kurds," *Council on Foreign Relations*

landownership and revoked citizenship for tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds.¹⁴¹ The Kurds did not fare any better in Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds frequently clashed with the Iraqi Monarchy and subsequent Iraqi republic army from the 1920s to 1960s, however the hostilities with Baghdad escalated in the 1970s when 600 Kurdish villages were destroyed and 200,000 Kurds were forcibly resettled to other parts of Iraq.¹⁴² And yet the worst atrocities came in the 1980s when Saddam Hussein engaged in ethnic cleansing and mass murder. Known as the *Anfal Campaign*, 90% of Kurdish villages were destroyed. Human Rights Watch estimates that between 50,000 and 100,000 people were killed, leading many in the international community to label Saddam's actions as genocide.¹⁴³

Road to Secession

Throughout the 20th century, Kurdish groups rebelled against their respective central governments, often leading to brutal conflicts and wars. The first real attempt at Kurdish independence came in Iran in January 1946 when the Iranian Kurds, backed by the Soviet Union, established the Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad, becoming the first independent Kurdish republic.¹⁴⁴ However, the Soviet support for the Kurds was largely driven by its desire to pressure the Iranian government to grant oil concessions. Once Soviet forces withdrew from Iran in order to obtain the oil concessions, the fate of the Kurds was sealed and the Kurdish republic collapsed.¹⁴⁵ While no state actually recognized the Kurdish republic and it was only able to survive for less than a year, it did

¹⁴¹ Barkey, "The Kurdish Awakening"

¹⁴² Rubin, "Who are the Kurds," 12 and "Kurdish History," *The Kurdish Project*

¹⁴³ Dave Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein: 1988 The Anfal Campaign," PBS Frontline. https://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq501/events_anfal.html

¹⁴⁴ Abdulla, "Mahabad – The first independent Kurdish Republic"

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

manage to inspire Kurdish nationalists everywhere.¹⁴⁶ During the downfall of the Shah in 1979, the Kurds were able to establish a little more autonomy in Iran, but again were unable to maintain it for long against the Islamic Republic.¹⁴⁷ In 2011, the Iranian government carried out a massive military campaign against the Kurdish guerilla group, Party for the Free Life in Kurdistan, which left hundreds dead.¹⁴⁸ However, the Iranian Kurds receive less international attention today than other Kurdish groups, likely due to the political repression and limits on international media coverage in the country.¹⁴⁹

In Turkey, multiple Kurdish rebellions were quashed by the Turkish government in the 1920s and 1930s, the revolts mostly fizzling out by the mid-century. However, in the 1980s the continued inequalities stirred further unrest among the Kurdish people, leading to the creation of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a group that embraced violence and employed guerrilla and terrorist tactics on the government and civilians. Proving to be a significant fighting force, the Turkish military has been unable to defeat the PKK who remain active in Turkey today.¹⁵⁰ However, in 2009 President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, launched a domestic peace process with the PKK in hopes of trying to end the violence that had killed almost 40,000 people since the 1980s.¹⁵¹ However, in 2015 negotiations broke down and conflict resumed between the Turkish government and the Kurds.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Rubin, "Who are the Kurds?" 13

¹⁴⁸ "The Time of the Kurds," *Council on Foreign Relations*

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ The U.S. and many of its allies designated the PKK a terrorist organization in 1997. *Council on Foreign Relations*. "Global Conflict Tracker". <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-between-turkey-and-armed-kurdish-groups>

¹⁵¹ Barkey, "The Kurdish Awakening"

¹⁵² Ibid.

In Iraq, the Kurds have also frequently revolted against the central government, fighting two wars during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵³ In the 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranians provided support to the Kurdish guerilla forces in their battle for independence and in return the Kurds joined the Iranians in attacking the Iraqi military. The Iraqi military under the direction of President Saddam Hussein responded with ground attacks, aerial bombing, destruction of villages, concentration camps, mass executions and chemical weapons. Saddam's Anfal campaign would grab the attention of the international community, labeling the attacks as Kurdish genocide.¹⁵⁴

Despite the brutal suppression and persecution of the Kurdish people in the 20th century, the Kurds have been able to achieve some success at greater autonomy, most notably in Iraq. During the Gulf War, as American forces were driving the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait, President George H.W. Bush encouraged the Iraqi people to rise up against the Saddam regime. The Iraqi Kurds and Shiites both heeded the message and led uprisings in the north and south. As Saddam turned his sights on quelling the uprisings, the U.S. and its allies declared a no-fly zone over the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq, effectively protecting the Kurds and leading to regional autonomy for the Kurdish provinces and the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).¹⁵⁵ After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Kurds were eager to assist and became an important ally in the war against Saddam. In 2005, the KRG was officially recognized as a semiautonomous region in the Iraqi constitution.¹⁵⁶ In September 2017, the KRG held a referendum on independence, which passed overwhelmingly. However, there was broad

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ "Kurdish Genocide," The Kurdish Project. <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-history/kurdistan-genocide/>

¹⁵⁵ Barkey, "The Kurdish Awakening"

¹⁵⁶ "The Time of the Kurds," *Council on Foreign Relations*

opposition for the referendum by the central government in Baghdad, neighboring countries, the U.S. and other Western powers. Baghdad ultimately refused talks on the matter and the referendum was annulled.

For Syrian Kurds, their opportunity at greater autonomy has come due to the Syrian civil war between the Assad regime and antigovernment groups and the fight against ISIS. The Kurds have not taken a side in the civil war but instead have taken the opportunity to fill the void where Syrian government forces have left, allowing them to establish self-rule in two regions.¹⁵⁷ The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) has governed Kurdish territory in Syria since 2012, and their military has been fighting against the Islamic State with the support of U.S. air strikes.¹⁵⁸ The Kurds were also able to expand their territory after defeating Islamic State forces and pushing them out of the region. However, their growing territory along the Turkish border has led to concerns by the Turkish state, leading President Erdogan to launch an invasion on the region. For the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, the path to greater autonomy was only possible due to the collapse or weakening of the central government and support from the international community, mostly the United States. However, the international community has been very inconsistent in its support to the Kurds throughout history.

International Community Reaction

The often-quoted phrase, “No friend but the mountains”, aptly describes the Kurdish peoples feeling of betrayal and abandonment due to their history as a stateless ethnic group without any faithful allies. Time and time again, the international community has come up short in throwing its full support behind the self-determination

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

of the Kurdish people. The United States and Allied nations first considered the idea of an independent Kurdish state after World War I. However, they caved to the demands of Turkey and failed to sign a treaty that included a homeland for the Kurdish people, ultimately leading to almost a century of oppression and violence against the Kurds in the Middle East.

In the 1940s, the Soviet Union briefly supported the Kurds in Iran, allowing for the Iranian Kurds to establish the first Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad in 1946, however Soviet support was mostly self-serving and ended once it received the oil concessions from the Iranian government. The Israelis and the Iranians supported the Kurds in Iraq in the 1960s, seeing them as a strategic ally against the radical Iraqi regime in Baghdad.¹⁵⁹ The United States also joined its Israeli and Iranian allies in supporting the Iraqi Kurds in the early 1970s, providing U.S. assistance in the form of weapons and training.¹⁶⁰ However, U.S. support was covert and they would not commit to a long-term strategy, fearing that an independent Kurdish territory would not be viable.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, the Israelis, Iranians and the United States rescinded its support for the Iraqi Kurds in 1975.¹⁶² The short lived support would be a recurring theme for the United States and other leading powers throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, alternating between supporting and ignoring the Kurds.¹⁶³

While the Kurds were fleeing Iraqi bombardments during the Iran-Iraq war, the international community was debating on whether or not to get involved in the internal

¹⁵⁹ Bryan R. Gibson, “The Secret Origins of the U.S.-Kurdish Relationship Explain Today’s Disaster,” Foreign Policy (October 14, 2019) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/14/us-kurdish-relationship-history-syria-turkey-betrayal-kissinger/>

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

affairs of a sovereign state.¹⁶⁴ But in 1991, in the wake of the Gulf War after President Bush encouraged the Kurds and Shiites to rise up against Saddam, the international community determined intervention was necessary to prevent another brutal genocide of the Kurdish people. The U.N. Security Council Resolution 688 of 5 condemned Saddam Hussein's repression and called on the international community to do what was necessary for relief operations.¹⁶⁵ The United States, with the support of France and the U.K., declared a no-fly zone over the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq, allowing the Iraqi Kurds to secure regional autonomy.¹⁶⁶ The Iraqi Kurds and Syrian Kurds were eager and willing allies to the United States during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the fight against ISIS, and the United States welcomed their assistance. However, the United States has been unwilling to support an independent Kurdistan, fearing that it will upset their allies in the region and lead to more conflict and instability. Without full and lasting support from the international community, the Kurds have still been unsuccessful in declaring their own independent Kurdish state.

DISCUSSION

The cases in this study are all unique, taking place in different regions of the world with different histories, circumstances and motivations. Some took a political approach to achieving their goals and others experienced brutal conflicts and wars. Nonetheless, they all shared the same aspirations of self-government and independence for their people. The cases all give meaningful insight into the key factors that are needed to make a secessionist movement successful and why in other cases the endeavor may be

¹⁶⁴ Judy Mayotte, "Civil War in Sudan: The Paradox of Human Rights and National Sovereignty," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Winter 1994), 497

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Barkey, "The Kurdish Awakening"

fruitless. Each case study looked into the historical context of the secessionist movement, the major grievances held by the group and why they wanted to secede, the process they took to achieve their goals of secession, and the reaction of the international community. While the current literature on the theory of secession focuses mainly on when a group has the “right” to secede, these cases show that a theoretical right to secession does not necessarily mean that secession will be successful. This research looked to better explain what key factors are necessary for a secessionist movement to succeed at gaining full independence. Based off the data, four main criteria have been identified; major injustices by the parent state on the people looking to secede, majority support in the region attempting to secede, a weakened parent state, and support from the international community and neighboring countries.

Injustices and the “Right” to Secede

As was discussed in the literature review, there is no right to secession in international law. However, there are instances when international law will tolerate secession, most notably when a people has been oppressed or colonized. This concept falls in line with Buchanan’s remedial right only theory of secession, that a group only has the right to secede if they have suffered major injustices. As the first two case studies in this research have shown, Bangladesh and South Sudan both met the criteria of having suffered major injustices by the parent state. Looking first at the case of Bangladesh, the Bengali spent more than two decades feeling that they were the victims of deliberate and unfair discrimination by the central government in West Pakistan. They were largely excluded from the decision-making on the country’s security, foreign and economic policies and felt that their cultural identity was being threatened. But the most significant

abuse by the central government was their reaction to the Bengali using the political process to push for greater autonomy in East Pakistan. The Pakistan government refused to accept the outcome of the East Pakistani elections and instead declared martial law and sent in troops to East Pakistan. The central government went on a reign of terror in East Pakistan with the *Operation Searchlight* campaign that massacred hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of people. Under these circumstances, the central government was threatening the very existence of the Bengali in East Pakistan, and therefore secession was seen as the last resort and only viable option for restoring peace and security in the region.

Similarly, in the case of the South Sudanese, they had experienced decades of oppression and injustices by Northern Sudan. Since Sudan gained its independence, the Arabs in the north controlled the government and implemented economic, military, political and social policies that only benefited the north and denied equal status and opportunities for the southerners. The central government also tried to force one religion and one culture on all of Sudan, threatening the identity of the South Sudanese. The south revolted against the north and fought almost continuous wars from 1947 to 2005. During the civil wars, major atrocities were carried out by the central government, displacing and killing millions of South Sudanese. Once again, secession was seen as the last resort and only viable option for ending the wars between the north and the south and trying to secure peace in the region.

The Kurds have also suffered major injustices by the parent states in which they reside. The central governments of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria all sought to suppress the nationalist aspirations of the Kurdish people and carried out oppressive rule that resulted

in the displacement and killing of hundreds of thousands of Kurds over the last few decades. The Quebecois on the other hand had not suffered any major injustices by the Canadian government, and therefore had less validity in their calls for independence. While some Quebecers have argued that as French-Canadians they are treated as second-class citizens, the major push for secession was to protect the unique cultural identity in the province. According to Buchanan, a group does not have the right to secede from a just state. While international law does not forbid secession from a just state, it leaves the decision to the domestic law and politics of the state to decide the outcome.

Majority Rule

The cases in this study have also shown that having majority support in the territory that wishes to secede is a critical factor in determining if secession will be possible. This also falls in line with both the remedial right theory and primary right theory, which both state that having a majority in favor of secession is necessary. The Bengali made their desires known in the overwhelming election victory of the Awami League that demanded an autonomous state and limiting the power of the federal government in East Pakistan. For the South Sudanese, their chance to show they had majority support was in the 2011 referendum, where 99% of South Sudanese voted to secede from the north. In the cases of the Bengali and South Sudanese, there was no denying they had majority support in their territory.

For the Kurds, the case of majority support is a bit more complicated. While the Kurds make up the majority in the region referred to as Kurdistan, their minority status in the countries in which they reside along with the separate Kurdish groups that have formed, makes it much more difficult to form a united movement for an independent

Kurdistan. Currently, the push for greater autonomy in the countries they reside has proven to be the best option for many Kurdish groups. However, even in Iraqi Kurdistan where a clear majority voted in favor of independence in the 2017 referendum vote, the government refused to recognize the referendum and the vote was invalidated. For the Quebecois, their failure to receive majority support in two separate referendum votes sealed their fate in being able to achieve their goal of independence. Without a clear majority, they could not move forward with negotiations with the Canadian government on the issue of secession.

Weakened Parent States

The third key factor in the success of a secessionist movement is the strength of the parent state. For the Bengali, the opportunity for independence came after the Pakistan government was defeated in the Indo-Pakistan war. While the war only lasted 13 days, the swift defeat of the Pakistan military allowed the Bengali to declare independence. South Sudan also benefited from the weakness of the central government in Khartoum. The increasing pressure from the international community to end the civil wars and allow for a referendum to be held on the issue of South Sudan independence, gave the Sudan government little choice but to comply.

For the Kurds and the Quebecois, the relative strength of the parent states made secession much more difficult. A 1960 intelligence report by the CIA argued that the Kurds of Iran and Iraq had the military strength, leadership and possible material support from an outside power, the Soviet Union, to make autonomy possible.¹⁶⁷ However, the report concluded that “only the relative stability of the parent governments stand in the

¹⁶⁷ Barkey, “Kurdish Awakening”

way of active Kurdish separatism.”¹⁶⁸ A strong parent state typically has the political and military strength to suppress any movements they see as threatening, which has been the case in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. While more recently, weakened governments in Iraq and Syria have allowed the Kurds to gain greater autonomy, it has not been enough to lead to full independence. In Canada, a strong central government made it difficult for the Quebecois to convince the majority of the people in the province that independence would be a better option. The central government’s fear campaign succeeded at making people weary of breaking away from the stability of Canada for the uncertainty of an independent Quebec.

External Support

Perhaps the most critical factor in the success of a secessionist movement is whether they have external support from neighboring countries and the international community. For the Bengali, India played a crucial role in helping them achieve independence. Without the support of the Indian Prime Minister and India’s willingness to support the Bengali resistance, they likely would not have been able to achieve independence in 1971. The same is true for South Sudan, support from the neighboring territories of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda as well as support from the international community to not only end the civil wars but to ensure that the referendum on independence was held, allowed for the South Sudanese to vote for secession and declare an independent South Sudan.

For the Kurds, international community support has been mixed and inconsistent. Since the end of World War I, support for different Kurdish groups has come from the Soviets, the Israelis, Iranians, the Americans, and others. However, support was largely

¹⁶⁸ Barkey, “Kurdish Awakening”

based on strategic considerations to fight other enemies and was less focused on supporting the Kurdish self-determination. The Soviets supported the Iranian Kurds in order to gain oil concessions from the Iranians. The Israelis, Iranians, and Americans supported the Iraqi Kurds in order to help quell the Iraqi government in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but quickly abandoned them by the mid-1970s. The United States has gone on to support the Kurds when it has been strategically advantageous in Iraq and Syria, but has failed to continue its support once its strategic objective was realized or abandoned. One of the major issues for supporting the Kurds has been the uncertainty that an independent Kurdistan would be viable. As a landlocked region, Kurdish territory would be surrounded by likely enemies, causing further instability in an already unstable region. For the Quebecois, without any major injustices to warrant international community intervention, they had little hope of garnering support from external powers. The issue of Quebec independence was seen solely as a domestic issue, and therefore the international community stayed on the side of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state.

CONCLUSION

From Catalonia to Scotland, Ambazonia to Kurdistan, nationalist groups continue to seek independence around the world. The 20th century saw the emergence of the principle of self-determination and the right of people to determine their political fate. Growing nationalist aspirations has led to a drastic increase in secessionist movements seeking to secede from existing sovereign countries. However, secessionist movements rarely achieve their goals of gaining independence. Current literature on the theory of secession focuses on what gives a group or people the right to secede, but focuses less on

the likelihood that a secessionist movement will actually be successful in achieving independence. This research study has looked to fill this gap by identifying four main criteria that make a secessionist movement more likely to succeed; suffering major injustices carried out by the parent state, majority support in the territory looking to secede, a weakened parent state, and the external support from neighboring countries or the international community. While these are not the only factors that will determine the likelihood of a successful secessionist movement, they have all proven to be of critical importance in the success or failure of secessionist movements. The cases in this study have also shown nationalist aspirations and secessionist movements often result in extreme violence and war, which has the potential to threaten international peace and security. The continued activities of secessionist movements around the world make it clear that this topic remains of critical importance to global security. However, as Donald Horowitz and Michael Jewkes pointed out, further research is needed on how to address the grievances and nationalist aspirations of minority groups without each group demanding the right to secede. Secessionist movements are rarely successful, and when they are, it typically comes at a great cost. The focus for future research should be on post-secession and whether or not gaining independence leads to peace and stability. While redrawing borders to accommodate self-determination may have been the right choice following decolonization, secession may not be the answer for the future of international security.

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